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SUBJECT: BURKINA FASO: DECENTRALIZATION STARTS IN EARNEST, BUT
COMMUNES NEED CAPACITY BUILDING AND FUNDING TO BE EFFECTIVE

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[1](#)1. Key Points:

-- Municipal elections in Burkina Faso were successfully carried out in April 2006, and resulted in an unparalleled increase in the number of elected female officials (5000 female councilors out of nearly 18,000).

-- Despite this progress, local governments struggle to carry out basic functions and implement development programs because the central government has not shared sufficient tax revenues;

-- Consequently, many municipalities and communes have turned to donors, especially sister cities in Europe, to partially fill the gap.

[1](#)2. Key Judgments:

-- On net, local populations have benefited from decentralization because they feel empowered to manage their local affairs.

-- For decentralization to be truly successful, however, municipalities and communes will need their own authority to collect taxes.

--The MCC Compact will assist many local communes to address the complex land reform process.

End Key Points and Key Judgments.

Institutions of Decentralized Government Created,
But Barely Operational Because of Lack of Funding

[1](#)3. Burkina Faso began decentralizing its government in 1991 to better respond to the basic needs of grassroots communities and institutions, allow local institutions to take an active role in rural development, and as part of a larger effort to democratize the nation. However, it was not until 1995 that the first local elections were held.

[1](#)4. In 2005, Burkina Faso promulgated a general code for territorial collectivities. Based in part on this new code, Burkina Faso held the latest round of local elections in April 2006, during which councilors were elected for each of the municipal (351), rural (302), and urban (49) communes. Additionally, 13 regional councils corresponding to the country's 13 regions were established, and 8000 village development councils were put in place. These elections resulted in an unparalleled increase in the number of elected female officials (5000 female councilors out of nearly 18,000).

[1](#)5. Although communalization became a reality with the holding of the 2006 elections, the effective operation of most rural communes remains problematic. With a budget so heavily dependent on donor assistance, the central government faces many difficulties meeting

the extensive development needs of each of the 351 communes, which have no way to finance their own development. A significant number of these communes lack the budget, personnel, infrastructures, or materials necessary to operate effectively.

¶6. Most newly elected mayors, especially in rural communes, have no office, equipment, means of communication, transportation, or support staff. Even if all the 49 urban communes built offices for their municipal councilors, there would still be a need for over 100 more offices for the 302 rural communes for their mayors and councilors. None of the 13 regions has office space for regional councilors.

¶7. Additional problems include a lack of education or understanding from local citizens about the decentralization process and how it involves their local institutions. Many village inhabitants are reluctant to participate in the process. According to the Burkinabe Movement for Human Rights and Development, this lack of understanding and reluctance could result in ethnic conflict between groups who wish to keep traditional ethnic and cultural ties instead of those imposed upon them by the creation of communes.

Cooperation with Foreign NGOs, MCC, Sister Cities

¶8. To help fill the gap in resources and capacity, Burkinabe law on territorial collectivities explicitly allows for the establishment of development cooperation between Burkinabe local collectivities and foreign associations. Foreign assistance to Burkina Faso's decentralization efforts covers such areas as water supply, sanitation and health, education, agriculture, animal husbandry, and energy. Ensuring the capacity building of mayors and other councilors to better manage the businesses and budgets of these local collectivities is another core element of this cooperation, as is public education about the responsibilities and services of local

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government.

¶9. France is the lead among the donor partners in the decentralization process with several other European countries and international organizations contributing to the process. The USG will join these donors with the Millennium Challenge Corporation compact land reform program. A land reform law was recently passed and its implementation will largely take place at the local level. MCC has already financed a sensitization campaign being carried out at the commune level, and will, once the compact is implemented, begin providing technical assistance for a legal framework. Additionally, the program is expected to focus on improving processes at local land offices, strengthening local legal institutions and dealing with the "red tape" in rural areas. Communes where more agricultural and land issues exist will be targeted. The project includes the construction of some municipal office buildings in which the local authorities will be able to conduct land business and other business related to the decentralization process. The country has been divided into 6 "socio cultural zones" and the land reform process will vary slightly in each zone.

¶10. Burkina Faso's key foreign partners in decentralization are, in addition to France as lead, include the French local intergovernmental organization "Les Cits Unies France," Germany, and Italy as well as the World Bank. Approximately 100 French local collectivities that are members of Les Cits Unies France have development cooperation partnerships with Burkinabe communes. For example, Loudun, France and Ouagadougou established sister city relations 40 years ago. Ouagadougou has benefited from this cooperation in several areas, including education (sponsoring of school children), training center, health (building of and equipping health units), small businesses (building of stores along the roads, purchasing grain mill), and building recreation entities.

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